

Flu Deaths Hit All-Time High; Weekly Case Numbers Continue to Drop

DOVER – The Division of Public Health (DPH) is reporting two more flu-related deaths that occurred during the last two weeks of February, bringing the 2017-2018 season death total to 30. This number breaks the previous single-season record of 28 flu-related deaths, set in 2014-2015. The deceased were both females, 83 and 84 years old, from New Castle and Kent counties, respectively. Both had multiple underlying health conditions.



The total number of flu cases in Delaware for the season is now at 7,071, also breaking the previous record of 4,554, set in the 2016-2017 season. These numbers only include laboratory-confirmed flu cases and the actual number of flu cases in the state is likely much higher. While overall numbers are at an all-time high, the number of weekly cases has dropped for the second week in a row. There were 381 lab-confirmed flu cases for the week ending March 3, the lowest number of confirmed flu cases in a week since the week ending January 20 when there were 375 confirmed cases. Hospitals and walk-in health clinics are also reporting a drop in patients with influenza-like illnesses.

“We are terribly saddened to learn of even more deaths this flu season,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “We’ve never seen a flu season this severe before and hope to never see one

again. It's important for everyone to remember that flu continues to circulate in Delaware, and to keep practicing vital prevention measures such as social distancing and frequent hand washing."

Social distancing means that if you are sick, do not go to school, work, or other social functions until you are fever-free (temperature less than 100 degrees F; 37.8 degrees C) for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication. You should wash your hands frequently and sneeze or cough into a tissue which you immediately dispose of. If you don't have a tissue available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow.

DPH continues to emphasize the importance of calling your primary care provider at the first sign of illness, and taking antivirals if prescribed. Delawareans are reminded to first go to either your physician or a walk-in clinic rather than the emergency room when symptoms are non-life threatening. People who are extremely ill with symptoms such as trouble breathing, bluish skin color, fever with a rash, dizziness, or severe or persistent vomiting should seek out immediate medical help.

Although the overall number of flu cases have gone down, DPH reminds Delawareans that as long as the flu virus is circulating in the community, there is still time to get a flu shot. DPH will be offering free flu vaccines on March 13, 2018, at the Pyle State Service Center, 34314 Pyle Center Road, Frankford, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and from 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. DPH also offers ongoing free flu shots at five State Service Centers. For more information about free flu clinics, visit <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/fluclinics.html>. To shorten your wait time, you can complete the vaccination form found at the bottom of the webpage and bring it with you.

For more information about flu surveillance in Delaware, read the weekly flu report at <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/epi/influenzawkly.html>. For

general information about the flu, visit <http://flu.Delaware.gov>.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.